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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Transatlantic Relations -  
France and U.S. Islam - Cartoons and Politics Iraq GWOT:  
Guantanamo  
PARIS - Tuesday, February 21, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Transatlantic Relations - France and U.S.  
Islam - Cartoons and Politics  
Iraq  
GWOT: Guantanamo

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

President Chirac's visit to India, Mittal Steel's hostile takeover bid on Arcelor and the government's legislative debate to protect French companies from takeovers are some of today's front pages stories. La Tribune in its editorial laments France's old guard attitude: "Since the fiasco of the Maginot line, strategists know that there is no defense that can oppose a determined and intelligent aggressor. In the battle for globalization played out before our eyes, France is sadly perpetuating its old strategy. Just when everyone else is opening up its borders, France is trying to build up walls!" The President's visit to India also serves as an introduction for Le Monde's editorial on a "Franco-American rapprochement." (See Part C)

The U.S. position in the Middle East and more globally how the West has reacted to the Muhammad cartoons continue to elicit commentaries. (See Part C)

Avian flu in Europe and the torture and consequent murder of a French man, with suggestions that the motivation was a hate crime because he was Jewish, make up the rest of today's news.

Left-of-center Liberation over the weekend reported extensively on a French citizen's ordeal at Guantanamo. Mourad Benchellali, released from Guantanamo to French custody and then later released into the public, recounts his odyssey. According to him, he started off on an adventure to learn more about Islam, ended up in Afghanistan, unintentionally in a Taliban training camp, and was captured, tortured in Kandahar and then remanded to Guantanamo. The article ends with him saying "maybe I made a mistake in going to Afghanistan, but I didn't deserve Guantanamo." An accompanying article is entitled "In the U.S. a blind eye remains the rule." "Your are welcome to visit Guantanamo, but you cannot see anything. That, in substance, was the invitation of the American government to the independent team of investigators, mandated by the UN's Commission of Human Rights. An invitation which they politely declined." The article highlights a quote from Secretary Rumsfeld: "There's no torture. There's no abuse (at

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Guantanamo.)" (See Part C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Transatlantic Relations - France and U.S.

"Transatlantic Duo"

Left-of-center Le Monde in its unsigned editorial (02/21):  
"Not so long ago, a visit by President Chirac to India, just prior to a similar one by President Bush, would have been interpreted as a sign of rivalry between Paris and Washington. While economic competition between the two nations remains, there is no longer strategic competition. In fact, President Chirac refrained from talking about a multipolar world, something that tends to annoy Washington no end. This omission is not fortuitous. It is in fact part of Chirac's new diplomacy. Indisputably, France has gotten closer to the U.S. And President Bush, who, since the beginning of his second term, has drawn the lessons from the Iraqi imbroglio, has everything to gain from not alienating his major allies in Europe. The rapprochement appears all the more stable because it relies on well-understood common interests. Faced with Iran's nuclear ambitions, France reacted with the same determination as the U.S, even if it continues to travel the diplomatic road. Paris and Washington have adopted the same

determined approach towards Syria. More generally, the terrorist threat and how to deal with it, has given birth to a sharing of views. Chirac's revisited nuclear doctrine is an echo of the American nuclear strategy. The rapprochement is discreet, probably out of a desire not to trigger a French domestic controversy and is the result of a close cooperation between advisers on both sides. What remains to be seen is whether the new Franco-American cooperation is durable, or just the result of an improvised about-face dictated by an uncomfortable position born from previous excesses."

#### Islam - Cartoons and Politics

##### "Questions Raised by the Muhammad Cartoons"

Pierre Roussel in right-of-center Le Figaro (02/21): "The controversy is not over. Musharraf's regime is being threatened by demonstrations while Churches were burned in Nigeria. The affair has underscored that in the West, questioning the precepts of Islam remains a sensitive issue. Anger was manipulated by those who want to ignite a shock between civilizations. and continues to serve those who want to settle domestic issues, as in Nigeria and Pakistan. If the manipulators can operate so easily, it is because they are functioning inside a frightening vacuum: who in the West really tried to calm the fires? Europe carries a heavy responsibility for not coming to the aid of Denmark. As for the U.S., it did not feel directly concerned by the crisis. The cartoons were not reproduced in the U.S., possibly because of the more important role of religion there. Still the U.S., like Europe, has been targeted by the demonstrators. It is not enough to say one does not want a shock between civilizations. Maybe one should try to deal with the disastrous image caused by the accusations of detainee treatments in Guantanamo; or try to give the impression we know where we are going in Iraq, or with Tehran. If all these questions were dealt with, it would be easier to explain the importance of freedom of the press. Meanwhile, Europe's moderate Islam seems to have understood its importance."

##### "Musharraf Under Fire"

Marie-France Calle in right-of-center Le Figaro (02/21): "Islamabad has no choice: two weeks before President Bush's trip, the government must squash the violent protests erupting against the Muhammad cartoons. Those using the controversy to mobilize the streets are using simple arithmetic: Bush, the Danish cartoonists and Musharraf all fall into the same anathema. The equation, at first glance, can appear odd, especially since the Pakistani government officially condemned the drawings. Still, the pressure in Pakistan is mounting with Musharraf increasingly in the line of fire. One of the most influential religious parties has declared the 'demonstrations will continue until Musharraf falls.' Danish and American flags are being burned together, and the Pakistani leader is, in a nutshell, being compared to a 'traitor.' Added to the domestic posturing in Pakistan which is taking a turn for the worse, there is the diplomatic crisis between Islamabad and Copenhagen."

##### "Washington and Instability in the Middle East"

Pierre Prier in Le Figaro (02/21): "In her speech in Cairo in June 2005, Secretary Rice said that what forced regimes to tighten the grip was not the Islamic threat, but rather the opposite: by restraining the field of the political, this triggered Islamic violence. There is a trend to beat one's 'mea culpa' in Western circles, repeating how certain regimes have been kept aloft in the name of oil and stability. Secretary Rice and the Department of State are looking for a

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real policy (for the Middle East). It will include a dialogue with non-violent Islamists. as in Egypt. The Quartet has announced it would talk to Hamas. For the U.S., time is pressing. Islamic strategists are not waiting for Washington to reassess its policy. They are going ahead with original policies, joining hands with Christians where it meets their needs. Stability is a thing of the past. With Iraq, Washington wanted things to begin to move in the Middle East. Now the difficulty lies in controlling how things progress in an explosive region."

##### Iraq

##### "The U.S. Other Failure in Iraq is the Economy"

Eric Le Boucher in left-of-center Le Monde (02/20): "Last Thursday Condoleezza Rice was flustered in front of the Senate financing committee's question concerning the state of affairs in Iraq. And the state of affairs is terrible. The insurrection has ruined the reconstruction effort. The cost of security absorbs 20 to 50% of the credits because of the bombs, the attacks and sabotage, not to mention a permanent atmosphere of intimidation. The patent failure of the Iraqi economy is the price to pay for the American failure to be able to control the country."

##### GWOT: Guantanamo

##### "Accusations"

Left-of-center Liberation in its editorial (02/20): "Nothing

obliges us to believe all the accusations made by the former French detainee about what goes on in Guantanamo, but at the end of the day, it is necessary to believe him when he shows how the U.S. has demeaned, with its arbitrary incarceration policy, its own principles. The accusations contained in this testimony feed others recently heard -- notably in Iraq where the British have been singled out." STAPLETON